

Webster, Graham. *The Roman Imperial Army*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969.

Rome the first fully professionalized standing army, this was only giving official recognition of what had been the actual state of affairs for many years. The auxiliary units were completely reorganized and given regular status. Instead of raising levies from the provinces as occasion required, the numbers of units and yearly intake of recruits were worked out according to a fixed annual scale, doubtless organized in close connection with the census of population, the initial purpose of which was the reorganization of taxation. Not every tribe was treated alike and there does not appear to have been a rigid, standardized system throughout the Empire. Tacitus tells us that the Batavi, on the Rhine, paid no taxes at all, but 'reserved for battle, they are like weapons and armour, only to be used in war'.<sup>1</sup> Conditions of service were also regularized and, most important, Roman citizenship was to be given on honourable discharge. This probably did not come into full effect until the time of Claudius. Spanish auxiliaries had received this privilege as early as 89 B.C., after the siege of Asculum, although at the time this was regarded as a special case.<sup>2</sup> This gave a real incentive in the first century to join the Army and serve it well. The cumulative effect of this steady extension of the franchise could hardly have been foreseen with at least 5,000 men ready for discharge each year from the *auxilia*.

Augustus was careful to avoid the posting of auxiliaries too far from their homeland, but with the development of the power of the principate any tender feelings of this nature were soon forgotten and there was occasional trouble. There was an example of this with the Thracians during the reign of Tiberius. These hardy warriors were very alarmed when they heard rumours that the system of service was to be altered and that units were to be drafted to distant parts of the Empire.<sup>3</sup> They were prepared to defend themselves against what they regarded as virtual enslavement and a short, but difficult, campaign ensued before they submitted. Another and more interesting example of natives rebelling against foreign service comes from the biography of Agricola. During his Caledonian campaign in the first century a cohort of Usipi from the Lower Rhine in Germany revolted. They were evidently raw recruits levied by Domitian and had been stationed for training in south-west Scotland.<sup>4</sup> They assassinated the centurion and soldiers in charge and seized three warships from the fleet, forcing their pilots to set course for their homeland. After suffering many privations and being reduced by starvation to cannibalism, for which they drew lots, they eventually sailed

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<sup>1</sup> *Germania*, 29.    <sup>2</sup> T. Ashby, *Class. R.* (1909).    <sup>3</sup> *Annals*, iv., 46.    <sup>4</sup> *Agricola*, 28.

organization, and soon adopting the ideas of personal hygiene reflected in the bath-house. The traditional view of soldiers as unruly and licentious is usually true of times of unrest or when they are far from their base. In the frontier forts and fortresses the young barbarians quickly learnt the basic elements of civilization by becoming members of an organized community and becoming exposed to Roman influences at least in the religious and social spheres. There were opportunities for betterment open to the bright young man with ambition and intelligence. If one accepts the Army as a rough but effective way of introducing fresh blood into the ranks of Roman civilization it is, numerically at least, impressive, for it means on an average about 10,000 new citizens a year. If, however, one adds their wives and families,<sup>1</sup> the total can be at least doubled and probably trebled over a hundred years. The Army could well have been responsible for adding three million citizens to the roll. All this helped to dilute the value of citizenship and it is likely that Caracalla's *constitutio Antoniniana* was not such a sweeping extension of the franchise as might appear at first glance.<sup>2</sup>

While a large number of young men were steadily brought from the fringes of the Empire under the influence of Rome it is clear that it was by no means a one-way effect. The steady flow of barbarians into the Army had an equal consequence of diluting the Roman way of life. The old Roman virtues so evident in the early Empire tended gradually to fade, but the most obvious loss is in the arts; while architecture continued to blossom with technical innovation there was a marked coarsening in sculpture and a more obvious decline in literature.

While these effects were only slow and gradual throughout the second century, the process may have been quickened by Severus, who was not readily accepted by the Senate and sought to bind the Army closer to himself and his family. The Army became the road to advancement even into

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<sup>1</sup> Up to the time of Pius, the granting of a discharge certificate gave civic rights to the recipient, his wife and his family, both those he already possessed or those he might acquire after discharge. But c. 138 there was a change in the formula on the diploma (the omission of the phrase *liberis posterisque eorum*) which implies that children born before discharge no longer enjoyed civic rights. This may not have affected many since, by this time, most of the auxiliaries were citizens on enlistment. Nevertheless it seems to be a peculiar change for this period and may have been due to factors which now elude us (Cheesman, pp. 32-34).

<sup>2</sup> Its main purpose, as Dio underlines, was to bring more people into the range of taxation and civic responsibilities which had hitherto been the privilege of citizenship. Nor is it clear precisely who was now included and who excluded.

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THE ROMAN  
IMPERIAL  
ARMY

OF THE FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES A.D.

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Plate I  
Tombstone of the  
centurion Facilis, at  
Colchester (p. 132).

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